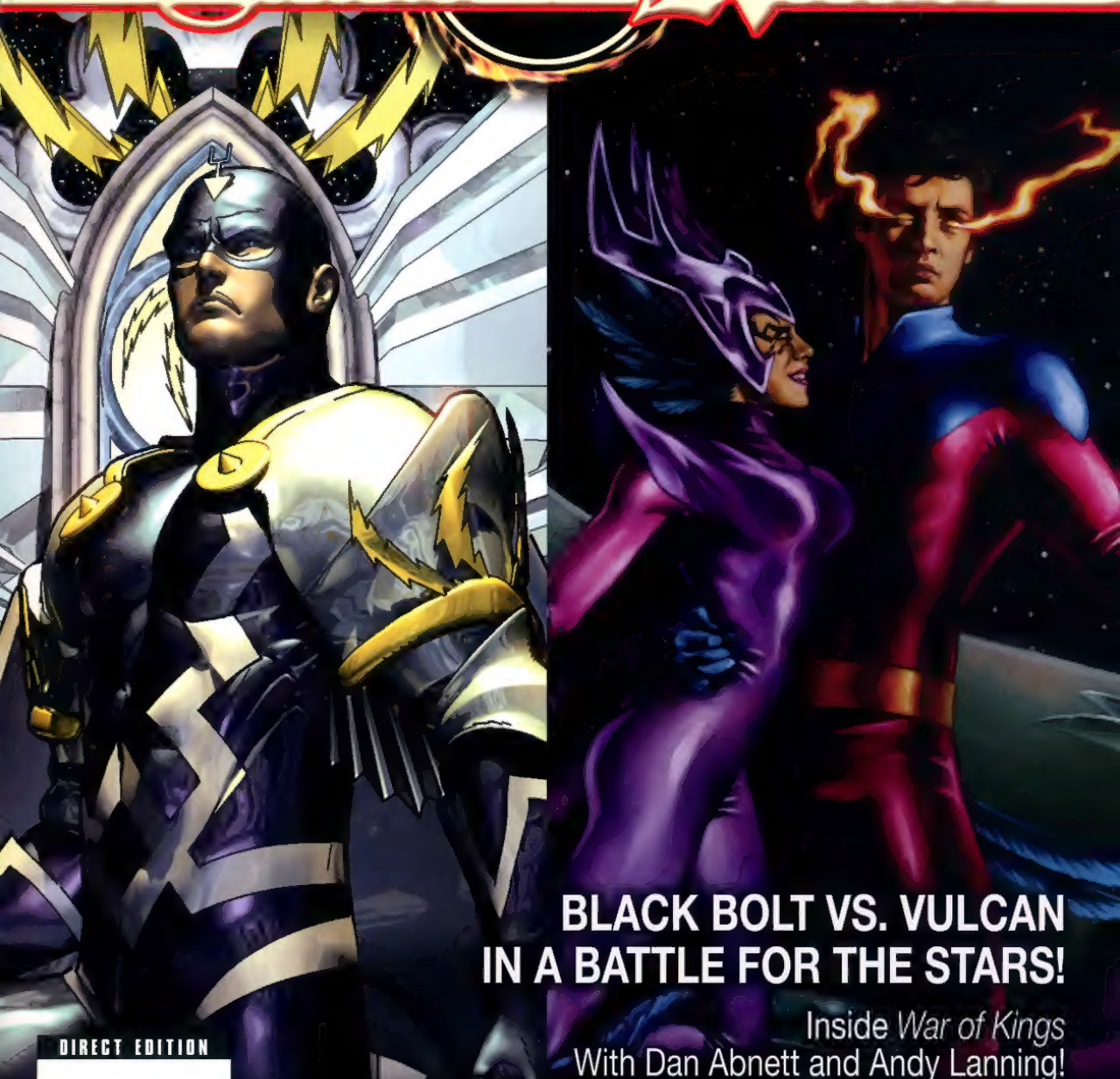
MARVEL SPOTLIGHT

WAR of KINGS™



BLACK BOLT VS. VULCAN IN A BATTLE FOR THE STARS!

Inside *War of Kings*
With Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning!

SECRET INVASION

was only the beginning . . .

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PLUGGING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Marvel's cosmic heroes have been working overtime the last couple years: Soon after the Annihilation Wave was put down in the pages of *Annihilation*, the threat of Ultron and the Phalanx had to be reckoned with in *Annihilation: Conquest*. But just when you thought it was safe to take to the stars, there comes the cosmic collision of two royal crowns: The Inhumans' Black Bolt and the Shi'ar Empire's Vulcan. Both are awesomely powerful in their own right, both have kingdoms of loyal followers, and both will *not* be moved!

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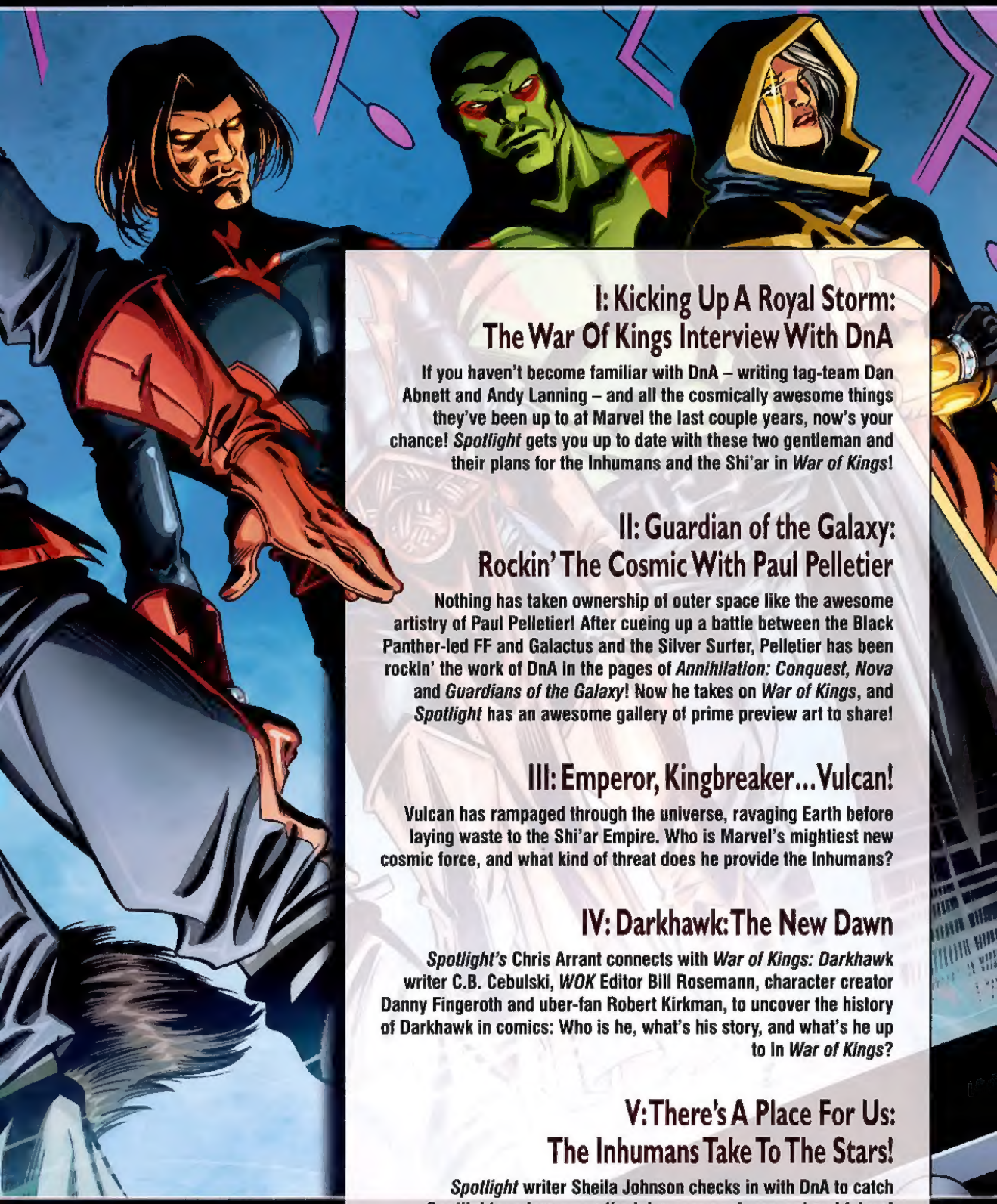

I: Kicking Up A Royal Storm: The War Of Kings Interview With DnA

If you haven't become familiar with DnA – writing tag-team Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning – and all the cosmically awesome things they've been up to at Marvel the last couple years, now's your chance! *Spotlight* gets you up to date with these two gentleman and their plans for the Inhumans and the Shi'ar in *War of Kings*!

II: Guardian of the Galaxy: Rockin' The Cosmic With Paul Pelletier

Nothing has taken ownership of outer space like the awesome artistry of Paul Pelletier! After cueing up a battle between the Black Panther-led FF and Galactus and the Silver Surfer, Pelletier has been rockin' the work of DnA in the pages of *Annihilation: Conquest, Nova* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*! Now he takes on *War of Kings*, and *Spotlight* has an awesome gallery of prime preview art to share!

III: Emperor, Kingbreaker...Vulcan!

Vulcan has rampaged through the universe, ravaging Earth before laying waste to the Shi'ar Empire. Who is Marvel's mightiest new cosmic force, and what kind of threat does he provide the Inhumans?

IV: Darkhawk: The New Dawn

Spotlight's Chris Arrant connects with *War of Kings: Darkhawk* writer C.B. Cebulski, *WOK* Editor Bill Rosemann, character creator Danny Fingeroth and uber-fan Robert Kirkman, to uncover the history of Darkhawk in comics: Who is he, what's his story, and what's he up to in *War of Kings*?

V: There's A Place For Us: The Inhumans Take To The Stars!

Spotlight writer Sheila Johnson checks in with DnA to catch *Spotlight* readers up on the Inhumans past, present and future!

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KICKING UP A

ROYAL STORM

The War Of Kings Interview With Dan Abnett And Andy Lanning

Ending A War And Launching A New One. Reviving Old Characters And Starting New Titles. It's All In A Light Year's Work For DnA

By Jess Harrold

Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning, the stellar writing team their fans refer to as "DnA," have their genetic fingerprints all over Marvel's current cosmic resurgence. After revitalizing the man called Nova during the *Annihilation* event and thereafter launching him into a critically acclaimed monthly series, the pair took the reins for the epic sequel, *Annihilation: Conquest*. Cementing their place as Marvel's very own "Guardians of the Galaxy," the British duo launched the disparate heroes of *Conquest* into a second ongoing series bearing that famous name. From talking raccoons to walking trees, sci-fi novelist Dan and comic book inker Andy have assembled a colorful cast of characters and carved out a cosmic corner of the Marvel Universe that is all their own.

Now, in their 21st year of working together, Dan and Andy come of age with a star-crossed tale that pits classic Silver Age creations Black Bolt and the Inhumans against the Shi'ar Empire and its despotic leader, Gabriel "Vulcan" Summers. They've annihilated. They've conquered. Now DnA are braced for the battle royal that is *War of Kings*.

SPOTLIGHT: So, if you'll excuse the dated musical reference, *War of Kings*: What is it good for?

ANDY: Absolutely nothing!

DAN: You fell into their trap… It's an enormously fun star-shaking event, a proper extension of existing stories in the Marvel Universe, following on from *Secret Invasion* and *Annihilation* and linking together major strands that have previously been disconnected: The heroes, the cosmics, and the X-Men books. It has a Machiavellian quality, as a story about power-playing and authority, war and politics, between great houses and royal families.

SPOTLIGHT: If it was a film, how would movie trailer guy sum it up?

ANDY: "In a universe…" Actually, rather a film trailer snippet, we thought our movie pitch for this would be *Star Wars* meets *I, Claudius* (a classic British drama serial depicting a Roman emperor with a stutter). Our central character even has a speech impediment…

SPOTLIGHT: In contrast to the universal threats that drove the stories in *Annihilation* and *Conquest*, *War of Kings* sees the Shi'ar and the Inhumans – and in particular their respective leaders, the titular kings Vulcan and Black Bolt – on a collision course. Where do readers find them at the start of *War of Kings*?

ANDY: The Inhumans we pick up directly from the end of the *Secret Invasion*: *Inhumans* limited series, with the *Secret Invasion: War of Kings* one-shot. That gives us an opportunity to put all the players and pieces in position, particularly coming out of the *Secret Invasion* element of the story, where Black Bolt obviously has been royally messed around with by the Skrulls, and wants to get some payback.

DAN: The Inhumans are basically saying for the first time, "We're not going

"The Inhumans are basically saying for the first time, 'We're not going to take it any more.'" – *War of Kings* co-writer Dan Abnett

to take it any more." They've perennially been the stoic victims of the Marvel Universe. Now, finally, they're rolling their sleeves up and are actively going to pursue their own destinies. If that means breaking a few eggs in the process, that's what's going to happen. This time they are doing something that will have lasting repercussions. Proper things happen. From a Shi'ar point of view it's been shown in recent X-Men stories, particularly the recent *X-Men: Kingbreaker* series, that Emperor Vulcan is pursuing an incredibly aggressive and expansionist regime. He wants to make the Shi'ar Empire bigger and stronger than ever before. The Kree are always going to be an obstacle to that, but he feels that, with the Kree very weak after Annihilation and the Phalanx invasion, he can take them with a minimum of fuss. What happens with the Inhumans and the political ramifications of their actions gives him every excuse, if excuse he needed, to go marching in there and say you're far too dangerous as neighbors and I'm going to do something about it.

ANDY: Everybody is being very ambitious.

SPOTLIGHT: Vulcan is a fairly new character. How would you describe him to a reader unfamiliar with his X-Men appearances?

DAN: He's the missing Summers brother to Havok and Cyclops but he's not entirely sane. He's got a huge chip on his shoulder about the crimes committed against him and his family in the past, so he's risen by brute force and mutant ability to be the emperor of the Shi'ar. We think of him very much as the Roman emperor Caligula. Short of making his own horse a senator…

ANDY: (*Interjects.*) Give him time.

DAN: …the parallels are quite strong.

ANDY: And he killed his own father. But we don't want him to be a pantomime villain, standing their twiddling his moustache (which he's obviously going to grow...) He's also doing this from a point of view of "he wants to be loved." He loves being adored by the Shi'ar, and he thinks the best way to get their adoration is to just keep conquering other people. It's kind of twisted, kind of sick. I believe the phrase is "mad as a box of frogs."

SPOTLIGHT: In contrast with Vulcan, the Inhumans date back to the classic Lee/Kirby *Fantastic Four*

SOUNDS OF WAR: Black Bolt unleashes the full force of his sonic scream at oncoming Shi'ar battle cruisers. (Art from *Secret Invasion: War of Kings* one-shot by Paul Pelletier.)

WOULD YOU HAVE US RETURN TO THE TERRAN MOON, WASH THE BLOOD FROM OUR HANDS, AND PRETEND EVERYTHING IS THE WAY IT WAS?
I'M NOT AN IDIOT, MEDUSA.
WE HAVE CROSSED A LINE THAT WE CANNOT UN-CROSS.
MURDER IS MUCH LIKE VIRGINITY. ONCE THE ACT IS DONE, IT IS ALWAYS DONE.

THE RESOLVE OF A QUEEN: Medusa stands resolutely by Black Bolt's momentous decision. (Art from *SI:WOK* one-shot by Pelletier.)

run. What do you think is their enduring appeal? What plans do you have to put your own stamp on them?

DAN: I think they are just great Stan and Jack characters, very distinctive, very memorable, but distinctly quirky. They have what is rare, I think, apart from the Fantastic Four – that family feeling. The fact that they're royalty is very interesting and they are all about nobility and responsibility as much as family ties.

ANDY: The Inhumans in their history were created by the Kree to become their Praetorian fighting force and during the course of the series we will see them living up to that heritage, which, up until now, they've denied and shied away from. They're going to become a lot more proactive, to the extent that they are going to weaponize some of their powers.

DAN: They'll be using weaponry that Maximus has designed for them, so they will get that slightly cool militaristic feel.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of Maximus, Black Bolt is working together with his mad brother at the end of *Secret Invasion*. What's your take on him?

ANDY: The reason we know he's mad is his name is Maximus the Mad. He was done for from birth that lad.

DAN: A little bit. Although Maximus has been genuinely mad on occasions, we see him as more troubled and misunderstood. He's not a black and white evil character, there's a lot that can be done with him.

ANDY: I think Maximus' madness is tidal, it depends on the moon.

DAN: Unfortunately, he lives on it!

SPOTLIGHT: Following *Secret Invasion*, Crystal is betrothed to Ronan the Accuser, a Kree. Is he a third king in the war? Will wedding bells ring out while war rages on?

ANDY: Ronan's sort of got a role as a pre-regent of the Kree, as it were, and that promise will not be forgotten about. There will be all sorts of royal shenanigans there.

SPOTLIGHT: Rival houses, reluctant marriage, and a key character in Vulcan that killed his own father. It's all sounding very Shakespearean…

DAN: Absolutely, there are parallels to be drawn. Roman dynasties, all that sort of thing. We're also both big fans of *Dune*, which has large dynastic entities fighting against each other and plotting down the centuries.

SPOTLIGHT: Are there any supporting characters to look out for that you've enjoyed writing?

DAN: We've deliberately chosen central point of view characters who are not the big bosses. We chose Crystal to represent the Inhumans, and

AT THE FEET OF A KING: Ronan kneels to Black Bolt on behalf of the entire Kree race. (Art from *SI:WOK* one-shot by Pelletier.)

"...We're trying to take readers into the cosmic wackiness via characters written on a very human level..."

– *War of Kings* co-writer Andy Lanning

Gladiator for the Imperial Guard, both as right hand people serving the leaders. Guardian is someone who has been around forever, but we are trying to put some flesh on those bones, so you actually go somewhere with the character. We've also enjoyed the Starjammers. One character we didn't think would be so important is Polaris, but then we realized her brother, Quicksilver, used to be married to Crystal. It's another example of how the Inhumans have ties all over the Marvel Universe.

SPOTLIGHT: Are there any stars-in-waiting you could see breaking out into their own titles after *War of Kings*, the way Nova did from *Annihilation*, and the *Guardians of the Galaxy* characters evolved from both *Annihilation* series?

ANDY: We think that if there is going to be a break-out character it's likely to be Darkhawk, because, rather like we did with Nova, he's the character we're dusting off in this series and particularly his own parallel mini-series, *War of Kings: Ascension*. If we do our job properly, people will want to see more of him, because we think we've got a very intriguing and compelling story to tell that will reposition Darkhawk as a main player. But who knows, it could be Lockjaw.

DAN: We've got two major dog characters with Cosmo, the Guardians' security chief. Rocket Raccoon as well. We could have an all animal team.

ANDY: Beware when they start marking their territory.

SPOTLIGHT: Do you have room on your collective plate for a third monthly Marvel series?

ANDY: At the moment, we write a book a week. One of those is the *Ascension* limited series. We're creaking under the strain, but it's all very enjoyable.

DAN: The great thing about it is that we might be writing a book a week but they're all books that tie into each other. Working at such a rate means we can keep track of all the continuity; we're feeding storylines from one book to another. If we were doing completely different Marvel books that would probably be more difficult. We'd be thrilled to expand the Marvel cosmos and give these characters room to stand on their own feet.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of your monthly series, to what extent will *Nova* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* intersect with *War of Kings*?

ANDY: Drawing an analogy with World War II, the war happening will lead to other events elsewhere. Both *Nova* and *Guardians* definitely will be intersecting with *War of Kings*, but only so much in that we will be telling their own stories against the backdrop of this massive galactic conflict. We've tried very much, as we did during *Secret Invasion*, to make sure we're telling the stories we want to tell rather than putting our stories on hold whilst we feel obliged to go into a crossover. The fact that we are orchestrating the main book makes that a lot easier because we can pick and choose the moments at which they cross over and have those make actual sense in the framework of both stories.

SPOTLIGHT: What do you think it is about Richard Rider that is clicking now with the comic-buying audience in a way that earlier attempts to bring him back have been less successful?

DAN: Nova's a long established character even if he's never had huge success. One of the things we did with him at first was to write his character as if he was actually aware of his own status, that he knew he was a second or third rate character who'd never really made it. That understanding allowed us to build on him and turn him into, certainly in terms of powers, a premier division super hero. Once you start playing with him like that and taking him seriously, it suddenly gives his character more impact. He makes a very cool cosmic hero, whereas on Earth he was more limited.

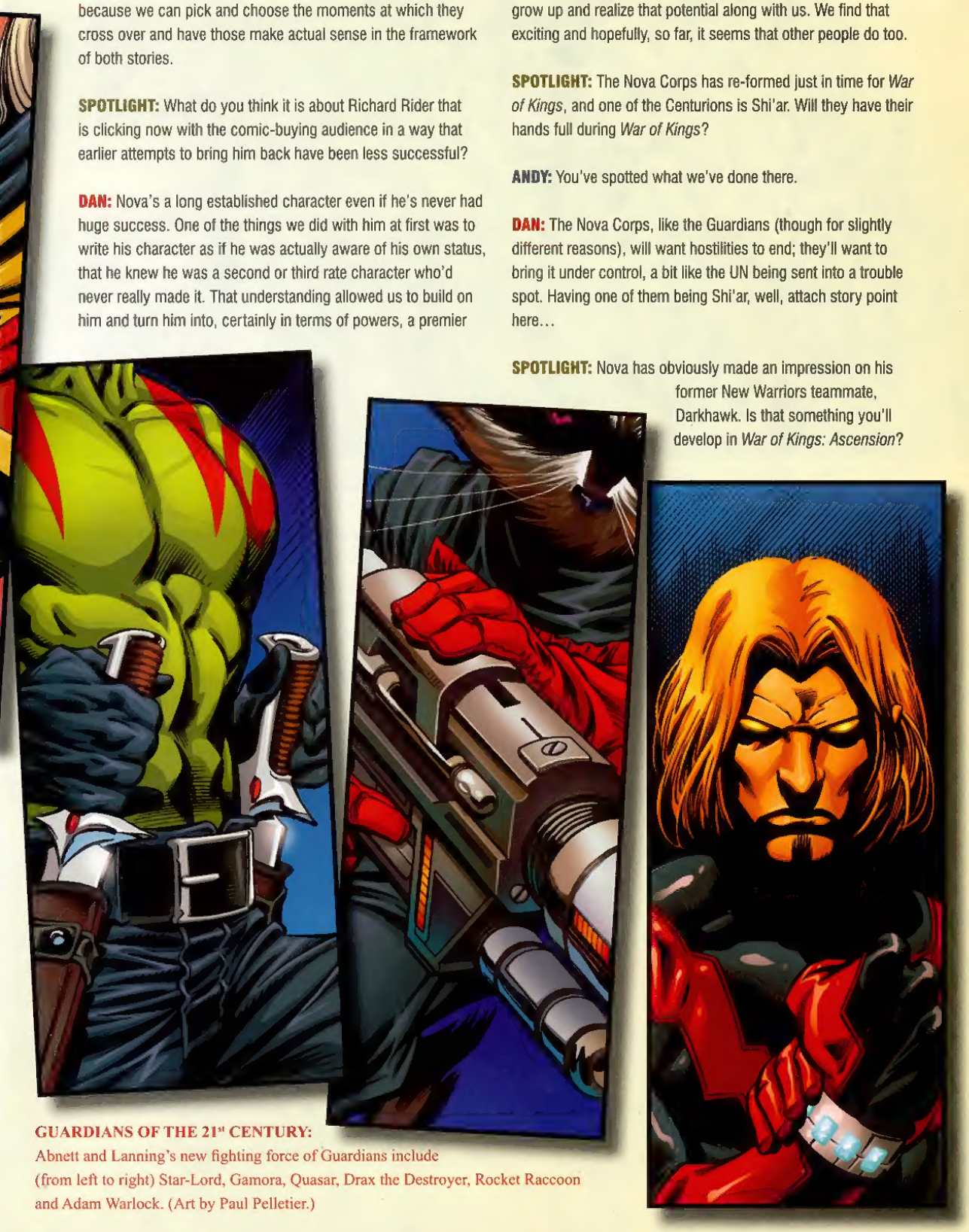
ANDY: We both grew up with Nova, and loved his stories when we were kids. There's a lot of story potential with him because nobody has done a lot with him. Hopefully, people reading it with a sense of nostalgia feel like they're getting to see that character grow up and realize that potential along with us. We find that exciting and hopefully, so far, it seems that other people do too.

SPOTLIGHT: The Nova Corps has re-formed just in time for *War of Kings*, and one of the Centurions is Shi'ar. Will they have their hands full during *War of Kings*?

ANDY: You've spotted what we've done there.

DAN: The Nova Corps, like the Guardians (though for slightly different reasons), will want hostilities to end; they'll want to bring it under control, a bit like the UN being sent into a trouble spot. Having one of them being Shi'ar, well, attach story point here…

SPOTLIGHT: Nova has obviously made an impression on his former New Warriors teammate, Darkhawk. Is that something you'll develop in *War of Kings: Ascension*?



GUARDIANS OF THE 21ST CENTURY:
Abnett and Lanning's new fighting force of Guardians include (from left to right) Star-Lord, Gamora, Quasar, Drax the Destroyer, Rocket Raccoon and Adam Warlock. (Art by Paul Pelletier.)

DAN: That's exactly how we're playing Darkhawk. He's looking at how Richard's gone out as a third rate space hero and come back as a warrior veteran of a cosmic war. He can see potential for himself there, and is a bit envious of Rich because they kind of grew up together.

SPOTLIGHT: As for *Guardians of the Galaxy*, you have a cast of characters that haven't seen much development in years, or even decades. How have you gone about scripting an anthropomorphic raccoon, giving motivation to an ambulant tree, or working out what makes Bug >tik<?

ANDY: Ba-dum tish! Really and truly, Keith Giffen set the bar so high with those characters in the *Star-Lord* limited series during *Annihilation*, and made them so likeable and such fun, it would be a crime not to do more with them. Instantly you could see the potential there, and we felt compelled to take that and run with it and threw in as much craziness as we could – their base is a decapitated Celestial head, they have a telepathic Russian cosmonaut dog as a security chief. All those ingredients we've mixed in have, we hope, kept that wacky flavor Keith created, and it seems to have struck a chord with people.

DAN: All these characters are fundamentally quite interesting, they're quirky, they've got bags of potential for humor. And because they are not the most famous heroes in the Marvel Universe, and they've only ever existed in little limited series or guest appearances, there's an enormous area to expand them because they haven't been developed. It's not like being given a team of well-known Avengers, where you have such a weight of continuity on you because you have Iron Man and Thor. The opportunities for expanding those characters are much more limited because the boundaries are set. With Rocket, Groot and Star-Lord there is much further you can go with them and greater creative freedom.

SPOTLIGHT: The title has already seen one "changing of the guard." Will the old order changeth once more during *War of Kings*?

DAN: Yes. The Guardians are going to be up to quite a lot during *War of Kings*, so we're actually sort of expanding their lineup again, bringing in some people that should be there and a couple of complete surprises. For the duration of *War of Kings* they will be quite a large team, though seldom deployed all in one place.

ANDY: They've got a whole galaxy to guard after all.

SPOTLIGHT: Guardians, Nova and the Annihilation events have been very successful. But why do you think cosmic books have been such a hard sell before now?

ANDY: Cosmic books take place in an abstract universe where anything can happen, and anything can be undone, and when you do that, as they have had a tendency to do in the past, you lose your resonance with your readers. What we're trying to do, which I think our readers appreciate, is that we're trying to take them into the cosmic wackiness via characters written on a very

human level that are a touchstone for the readers themselves.

DAN: Also, we're trying to establish as best we can the cosmic playground, so there is a sense of a consistent geography of where the Shi'ar and the Kree and certain planets are. It may not be as familiar as the real world that people actually know, but it's not just endless space and another invented planet.

SPOTLIGHT: Looking to the future, once the dust settles on *War of Kings*, are you still brimming with energy with years' worth of celestial extravaganzas left to tell? Or are you all spaced out and yearning for some street level Marvel action?

DAN: We've got loads of stuff we want to do yet. We love doing this; Marvel cosmic is just brilliant to work with. We grew up with it and loved it ever since we started reading it. We have got a lot of ideas for different stories, and for every character there's something we particularly want to do with them. We've still got a lot of stuff from the initial pitch we had for Nova that we haven't gotten to, plus we've got all the red herrings and portents we've thrown in along the way. We've got them queuing up like, well, something that queues a lot.

SPOTLIGHT: Are there any characters from Marvel's rich cosmic history you still haven't been able to use after *War of Kings*, but hope to in the future?

NOVA CORPS: In the pages of *Nova*, Abnett and Lanning have revived the Nova Corps on Earth…led by Richard Rider's brother, Robert! Nova's *War of Kings* tie-in begins with *Nova* #23. (Art from *Nova* #20 by Wellinton Alves.)

DnA TEST

Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning have been writing together for 21 years, but who has been paying the most attention during that time? *Spotlight* sat them in soundproof booths, and quizzed them to see which partner knows most about the other.

Dan on Andy

Dan Abnett

Who is Andy's favorite Guardian of the Galaxy?
Rocket. Or Groot.

If Andy could write any other Marvel book, what would it be?
Doctor Strange or *Thor*, maybe?

What was Andy's first Marvel comic book?
To read, I would think early *FF* or Thomas/Buscema *Avengers*.

Which is it for Andy: Star Trek or Star Wars?
Ooooh, loves both, but in a pinch, I'd have to say it would be Kirk-era *Trek*.

What is Andy's favorite cheese?
A really mature cheddar. Which is odd, because 'really mature' is not a phrase you'd otherwise associate with him.

Dan scores two out of five, if we're generous. He hedged his bets on the Guardians, but did correctly name Rocket Raccoon first as Andy's favorite. He also knew his partner's Trekkie tendencies. However, Andy's desire to write X-Men, *introduction to Marvel via* Amazing Spider-Man *and liking of a nice Stilton, escaped Dan's attention.*

Andy wants to be Rocket Raccoon when he grows up.

Andy Lanning

Andy on Dan

Who is Dan's favorite Guardian of the Galaxy?
Groot.

Which artist Dan has never worked with would he love to write for?
Richard Corben.

If Dan went to a super-hero costume party, who would he be?
Dr. Manhattan!

Which is it for Dan: Classic Battlestar Galactica or new Battlestar Galactica?
New.

What's Dan's favorite vegetable?
The humble potato?

Andy scores a disappointing one out of five. He correctly noted Dan's preference for new Battlestar, but was blissfully ignorant of Dan's feelings for Gamora, his appreciation of Kang's couture and his penchant for parsnips. Dan would have loved to have collaborated with John Buscema, and would also like to write for Howard Chaykin or Frank Quitely.

"You've probably realized by now that Dan and I have never met and wouldn't know the other if we fell over each other," admitted a defeated Andy.

— Jess Harrold

DAN: The key one we'd love to write is Captain Marvel, because it's the other great Jim Starlin character we haven't had chance to get our hands on yet. As far as we're concerned, Starlin could do no wrong. But obviously, Mar-Vell's tied up with Marvel Earth continuity at the moment, so that makes it slightly harder. But maybe at some point…

ANDY: The cosmic universe is littered with throwaway characters that have popped up in various stories here, there and everywhere. If I can bring Tim Boo Ba back, it would be wonderful. We've got loads more toys to play with.

SPOTLIGHT: Lastly, when a reader turns the final page of *War of Kings*, how do you hope they will feel?

DAN: Amorous but flaccid.

ANDY: Sturdy yet moist.

DAN: No, we hope they really, really enjoy the story and more particularly feel that a real story has been delivered with a beginning, a middle and an end, rather than a circular return to the status quo. I'd like to think there'll be a certain degree of shock, an Oh my God, I can't believe they did that, but I'm very glad they did."

ANDY: This is going to have a significant impact on the Marvel cosmic universe that will change things for good. At that point onwards, things are not going to be the same and people are going to want to stick around and see exactly what comes next. We really do open the boundaries of the universe, so hopefully more people will come on board and enjoy what we're doing.

99% of people who've read ANNIHILATION, NOVA, GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY – or any of the other cosmic comics DnA have been delivering – are on board and enjoying it! It's that 1% of holdouts waiting for Tim Boo Ba that are the problem. Until then, good luck to DnA and get back to work on your rousing stories in WAR OF KINGS! ●

EMPEROR VULCAN: One of the major players in *War of Kings*, the third Summers brother, Vulcan, claims dominion over the Shi'ar Empire (Art from *X-Men: Kingbreaker #1* by Dustin Weaver.)

Artist Paul Pelletier Is ROCKIN' THE COSMIC In War Of Kings!

By John Rhett Thomas and Dugan Trodglen

We're just gonna come right out and say it: The popular Paul Pelletier is a perspicacious penciler without peer! And just to prove we mean it, we're gonna stand up on Irving Forbush's coffee table and say it fast ten times in a row! Yes, we're that serious! Ever since we got to feast our eyes on the lush dynamism of his work on Fantastic Four (see *The New Fantastic Four* collected in HC and TPB), we were sold, and after seeing what he's done with DnA on *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Annihilation: Conquest* and now *War of Kings*, he's one of the Spotlight office's fave artistes! (You saw right! *Artiste*!)

Before we preview some of his elegant pencil art from the first issue of *War of Kings*, we thought it proper to introduce you to the guy and give him a chance to field some questions of a cosmic origin. So stick with us through the earthbound words before we get to the out of this world art!

Art from Guardians of the Galaxy #7 by Paul Pelletier.

OF THE GALAXY

SPOTLIGHT: Right after a *Fantastic Four* run that included a big space adventure, you moved to *Nova*, to *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and now to *War of Kings*. Do you ever feel like you live in outer space? Are you surprised to have found yourself so closely associated with the cosmic corner of the Marvel Universe?

PAUL: Yeah, I always seem to be floating around in some cosmic craziness! I'm not that surprised, though. When I worked with CrossGen years ago, I penciled nearly 27 issues of *Negation*, which was a nutty sci-fi adventure comic book with super-hero tendencies. That was also when I first met Bill Rosemann, my current editor. It's not too surprising that when we hooked up again at Marvel, I'd be working on some kind of insane cosmic mayhem!

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of insane, three of the aforementioned books are authored by Marvel's beloved cosmic creators DnA (aka Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning). Are they pretty easy to work with, or even better, can you dish any dirt on this kooky pair?

PAUL: I'm not sure exactly how DnA conjure up these wacky storylines, but I can say this much about them: They're very easy to work with! It's great to know that every time I finish an issue, the next plot is ready and waiting with no time wasted. They're incredibly professional, which is fantastic when operating under a deadline. I feel very lucky to be working with them!

SPOTLIGHT: So, no dirt huh? Seriously, you've been working

"I've always had a 'cartoony' edge to my art style, so drawing Rocket Raccoon in this cast of characters wasn't too strange."

– Artist Paul Pelletier

with them for a while now. Is there anything about the process with them that is unique: Either the inspiration you get from their scripts or any other facet of your collaboration?

PAUL: Unique...? Not really. DnA simply supply me with inspired stories that push me hard to "up my game" with every single issue. There's no resting when working on one of their plots. It keeps me sharp!

SPOTLIGHT: Since *Annihilation* launched back in 2006, there's been a common thread underpinning all the stories. Has remaining partners with writers Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning made it easier to view what you've been doing as part of a specific larger tapestry?

PAUL: Sort of...but it doesn't help in trying to keep track of the fifty million characters I'll have to draw in these books!

SPOTLIGHT: You certainly do excel at these books that combine sci-fi and super hero. Are you conscious of mixing genres or as a storyteller is this sort of labeling all window dressing?

PAUL: Well, since it's sci-fi, there is a lot more room for creativity. I'm not restrained by "real world" situations. It allows me to play around with funky character designs and bizarre locales more so than "mainstream" comics. Besides, sci-fi and super heroes have been mixed together for decades. Lee and Kirby's *FF* is the perfect combination of the two. Some of the best stories in Marvel super-hero history are knee-deep in sci-fi; The Avengers Kree/Skrull War stuff, Silver Surfer, the Uncanny X-Men Phoenix Saga, and more recently, stuff like *Secret Invasion* and *Fantastic Four: The End*.

SPOTLIGHT: The first book in your adventure into the Abnett/Lanning Cosmic Corner was *Nova*, and your first storyline reintroduced the *New Mutants* character Warlock. It also used Warlock's fellow techno-organic race the Phalanx. I must say: Your take on them was absolutely breathtaking! What did you use as inspiration for rendering these seemingly difficult to draw creatures?

PAUL: Thanks for the compliment! I really tried to stay true to the work that Art Adams did with Warlock, waaaay back in the *X-Men/New Mutants* days. I loved the animated nature he gave Warlock and opened up many roads in how to deal with him. Very expressive stuff! Was he difficult to draw? Heck yeah! That's why I never drew him the same way twice. I just made sure that there was enough similarity to him from panel to panel so that readers would still recognize him. Just when I started getting the hang of drawing him, the story was over!

SPOTLIGHT: *Guardians of the Galaxy* is a book with a large cast, including a dog and a raccoon, and numerous strange alien background characters. A lot of the book takes place in the claustrophobic Knowhere space station where setting a large cast, particularly in a battle scene, seems like it would be tricky. What proved to be your biggest challenge with that comic?

WELCOME TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE: Blastaar reigns supreme in the post-Annihilus era of the NZ. (Art from *GOTG* #7 by Pelletier.)

VANCE ASTRO: The legendary Guardian was recently found encased in ice with Cap's shield. Whassup?!?! (Art from *GOTG #2* by Pelletier.)

PAUL: Getting to know each character and how to draw them when there is such a big cast can be tricky. It always takes me a few issues to get used to a character, so it takes me a bit longer when I have a large team of them to worry about. It's always a challenge to give each character their moment when you're drawing a battle scene in which you have to establish the locale, worry about tech and hardware, and have to account for multiple heroes/villains fighting, talking and whatnot in each panel. It's quite a juggling act!

SPOTLIGHT: How weird is it drawing Rocket Raccoon in the middle of all of this? He is obviously supposed to stick out like a sore thumb visually, but that must be counter-intuitive to an artist.

PAUL: Not really. I've always had a "cartoony" edge to my art style, so drawing Rocket Raccoon in this cast of characters wasn't too strange. I loved the way Tim Green drew him in his *Star-Lord* mini, so I tried to incorporate that same feeling when I drew him. Of course, just when I was really getting a grip on drawing him...*BAM*! I'm off to pencil *War of Kings*!

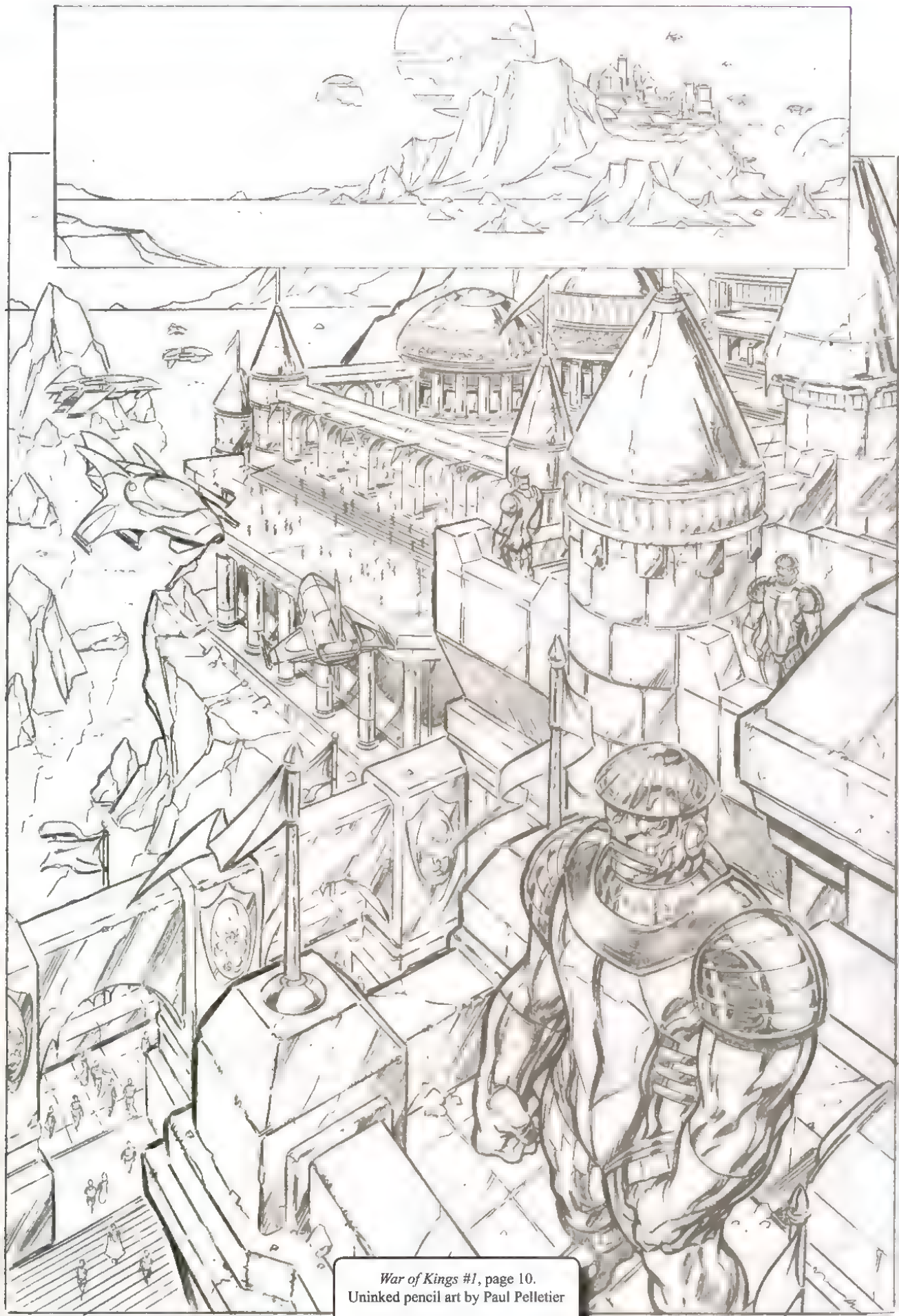
SPOTLIGHT: After *War of Kings* wraps up, what's next?

PAUL: I'm not sure yet. There's a strong chance that I'll be back on *Guardians of the Galaxy*. I would love to take a crack at drawing characters like Thor or Hulk, but...who knows what the future holds!?! Right now, I've got my hands full with *War of Kings*. I pray that the gods of Marvel Cosmic give me strength! I just hope that everyone who picks up *WOK* enjoys it as much as we have putting it together.

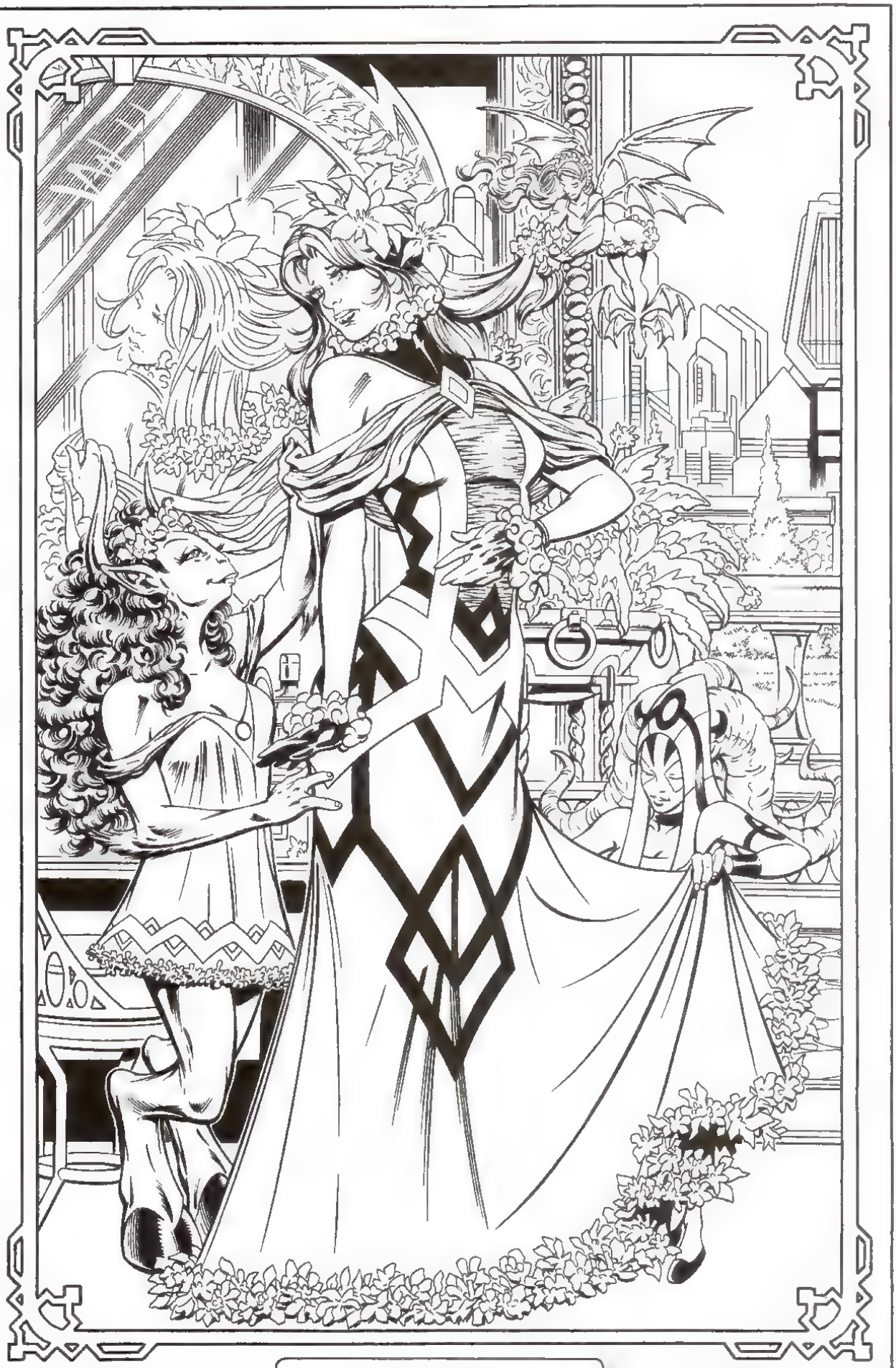
After seeing his recent work on FANTASTIC FOUR, Paul Pelletier became one of the Spotlight office's favorite artists! After taking a glimpse of his work on WAR OF KINGS, he might just make our Hall of Fame! You keep on blowing minds with your cosmic art, Paul, and we'll keep reading! See ya in WOK! ●

Spotlight is proud to preview some black and white Paul Pelletier pencil art from *War of Kings!*

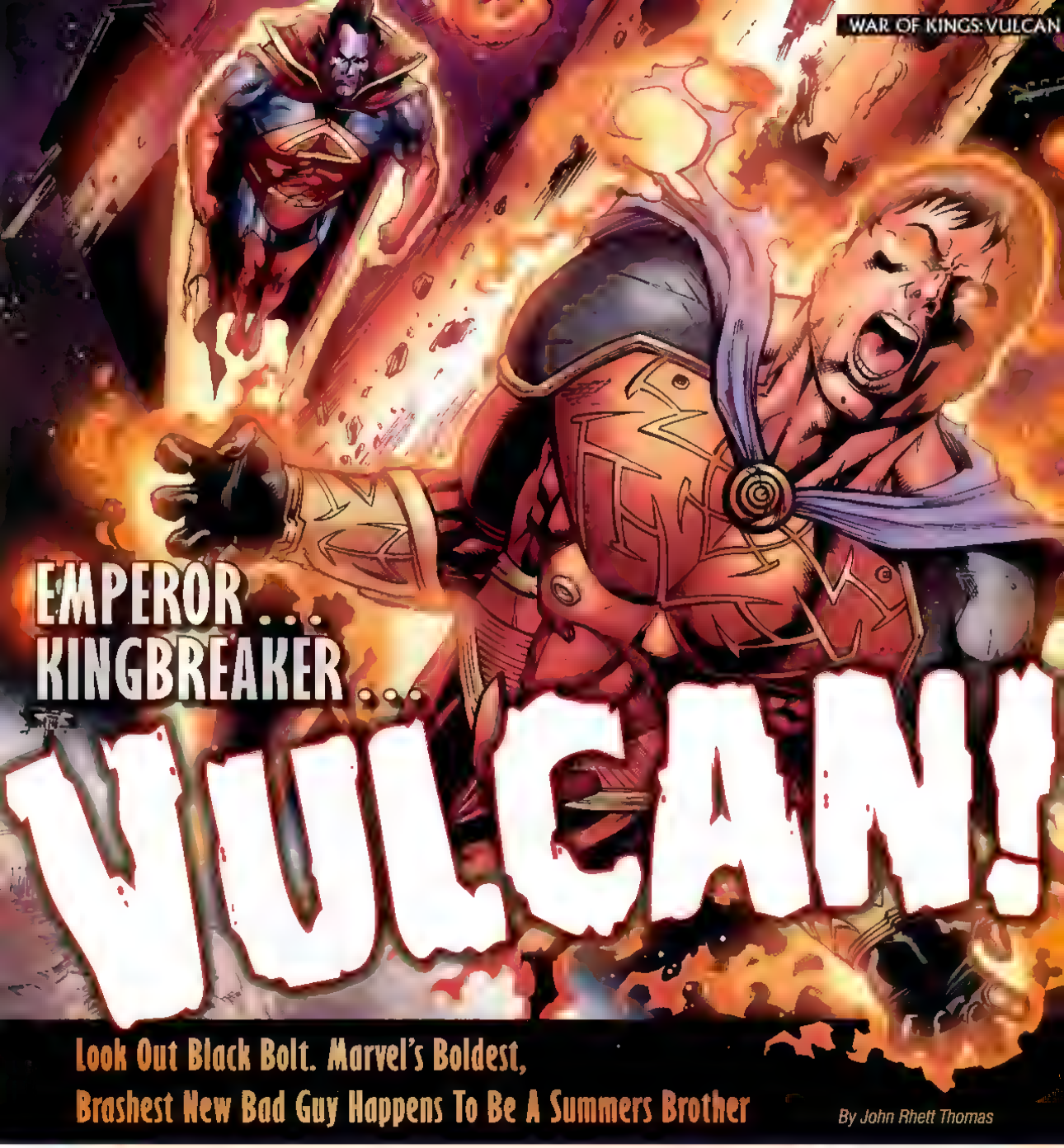
War of Kings #1, page 9.
Uninked pencil art by Paul Pelletier.



War of Kings #1, page 10.
Uninked pencil art by Paul Pelletier



War of Kings #1, page 4.
Inked black and white pencils by Paul Pelletier.



EMPEROR... KINGBREAKER... VULCAN!

Look Out Black Bolt. Marvel's Boldest, Brashest New Bad Guy Happens To Be A Summers Brother

By John Rhett Thomas

War of Kings pits Black Bolt, one of the most recognizable icons to Marvel faithful, against Vulcan, a brash newcomer to the House of Ideas' rich tapestry of characters. But who is this newbie on the Marvel scene, and what's the regal head of the Inhumans have to fear? Ed Brubaker brought Vulcan to life in the pages of *X-Men: Deadly Genesis*, a scintillating five-issue limited series that introduced Gabriel Summers as the long lost brother to Cyclops and Havok. He was so long lost, in fact, that nobody remembered he ever existed! (Well, except for a few folks, like Charles Xavier, but you gotta read the story for more details!) Shortly after his revival, Vulcan began a rampage of revenge that took the life of Banshee and eventually led to the stars, where he ran roughshod over the elite guardians of the Shi'ar Empire, eventually wresting control of it and becoming its leader. If a guy can go from being in a coma to leading an entire galactic empire, you know he's got some power behind him!

That brings us to Christopher Yost, one of Marvel's hot young writers who has picked up the story of Vulcan where Brubaker left off, spinning two consecutive mini-series of patented, X-Men-style, space operatics. In *X-Men: Emperor Vulcan*, Yost led readers through Vulcan's solidifying grasp on Shi'ar power and his confrontations with the new Starjammers led by his brother Havok. And in the current series, *X-Men: Kingbreaker*, Yost finds that the revenge fantasies harbored in the heart of Vulcan are given free reign now that the emperor has his brother in captivity. It's an exciting, adrenaline-filled prelude to the big action in *War of Kings*, and we pulled Yost aside to get his take on writing the other "King" in the *War of Kings* crossover.

"WHILE OTHER CHARACTERS MAY HAVE DUG DEEP AND RISEN ABOVE IT ALL TO BE A HERO, VULCAN DIDN'T. VULCAN WENT THE OTHER WAY."

SPOTLIGHT: Vulcan was first revealed as the third Summers brother in Ed Brubaker's *X-Men: Deadly Genesis* and then spent twelve issues of Bru's *Uncanny X-Men* seeking vengeance against the Shi'ar. What was your sense of the character of Vulcan when you inherited him in Emperor Vulcan?

CHRISTOPHER: I always saw Vulcan as the victim, to a point. Horrible things were done to him, but he still wanted to be a hero. And when he got his shot, he was betrayed by Charles Xavier of all people. And while other characters may have dug deep and risen above it all to *be* a hero, Vulcan didn't Vulcan went the other way. Which I thought was a pretty great thing. He comes from a line of heroes, but the anger and betrayal and loss is too much for him, and he chooses differently.

SPOTLIGHT: Is he still pretty much the same guy as we enter *War of Kings*? If not, what have you done to adapt his character?

CHRISTOPHER: I think emotionally, he's in a different place. He's succeeded in some great ways: He's taken over the Shi'ar Empire, and earned the Shi'ar people's love. But in other, possibly more important ways, he's failed. He couldn't break Havok. The Starjammers are still alive. The people he cares about most in some ways, they think he's the villain, not the hero. As he enters *War of Kings*, he's going to be in a dark place, worse than ever before.

SPOTLIGHT: I loved the reveal late in Bru's *Uncanny* run where it was noted that Vulcan had the maturity level of a 15-year old. It put all his past behavior in a proper context as adolescent rage, almost on the level of a temper tantrum except with cosmic power backing it up. Is he still in that same mindset as you write him, or has he evolved a bit since then?

CHRISTOPHER: He's a character who can't really identify what he wants, so he goes for the easy goal: Revenge on all those who failed him, on those who hurt him or betrayed him. Eventually he may get to the point of *"Now what?"* and he won't have an answer. He doesn't have the maturity to identify it. In *X-Men: Emperor Vulcan* and *X-Men: Kingbreaker*, he's all external, no introspection. And of course, he's playing King. That appeals to him...being the most powerful, having the hot girl; these are immature things.

KORVUS: The new Starjammer is bringing it with his Phoenix-powered broadsword! (Art from *XM·K #1* by Weaver.)

GABRIEL SUMMERS: Vulcan's first appearance, as the bent on revenge brother to Cyclops and Havok, was in Ed Brubaker and Trevor Hairsine's *X-Men: Deadly Genesis* (Cover art to *Deadly Genesis #5* by Marc Silvestri.)

SPOTLIGHT: Vulcan killed his father without remorse, he's tortured his brother, Alex, and we know all of the nastiness he was capable of in *Deadly Genesis*. Yet, he's still a Summers brother, and his back story has a pretty deep vein of tragedy to it. Is there any redemption available to him in the future, perhaps through *War of Kings*? Or is he pretty solidly cast as a villain right now?

CHRISTOPHER: I'm going with "villain." At every turn, he's taken the villain's path and there's a point of no return. Killing his father and Banshee are that point. Even if he saves the universe tomorrow, he's still that guy. He and Havok teamed up to defeat the Scy'ar, and enemy race that threatened the M'kraan Crystal, but Vulcan turned right around and betrayed Havok, then committed genocide to prove himself to the Shi'ar. Professor Xavier even on his *worst* day would not approve.

SPOTLIGHT: One of the cool new characters from the Vulcan storyline is Korvus. Can you tell us about him and if he's going to gain more prominence through *War of Kings*? Dig that sword!

CHRISTOPHER: Check out *Kingbreaker* for a turning point with Korvus. When he enters the *War of Kings*, he's going to be a changed character.

SPOTLIGHT: In addition to your previous work on *New X-Men*, your current work on *X-Force*, and your maintenance of post-Brubaker Vulcan/Havok and Starjammers stories, it seems you have a pretty solid lock on X-Men Universe turf. But can we possibly expect you to stick around in the cosmic corner of Marvel once *War of Kings* winds down?

CHRISTOPHER: Fingers crossed! I love X-Men, I love space... it's a dream come true being involved with this. So assuming at least one Starjammer survives, hopefully I'll be writing him (or her).

X-MEN: KINGBREAKER continues through its fourth issue, when it makes way for the WAR OF KINGS event series. For more exciting X-action by Christopher Yost, be sure to check out X-FORCE, an ongoing series spun out of the hugely successful Messiah CompleX event! ●

DARKHAWK:

THE NEW DAWN

SPOTLIGHT DELVES INTO WHAT MAKES THE WAR OF KINGS STAR SO COOL

By Chris Arrant

It's a new day for the man known as Darkhawk. After his hot debut in 1991 and a fifty issue run of his own series, the character has remained largely in the background until recent resurgence in the pages of various Marvel comic books. Beginning last year with his role in the ensemble limited series *Loners*, he then appeared in the ongoing series *Nova* in a new role protecting Project: P.E.G.A.S.U.S. And now, Chris Powell and his superhuman alter ego are taking things into space with a pivotal role in the *War of Kings* event.

War of Kings: Darkhawk is a two-issue limited series launching in February 2009 courtesy of writer C.B. Cebulski and artist Harvey Tolibao. We know it's Darkhawk, and it takes place under the "War of Kings" banner – that's in the title – but what's it really about?

"I can't give you too much without giving plot points and story lines away, but let me say this is going to be a real firecracker of a series," said writer C.B. Cebulski. "We're packing so much bang into the pages that we've been given that we are going to blow readers' minds. Darkhawk and his origin will be shaken. The mythos of his amulet and armor will be called into question and turned on their ear. We touch on everything, as well as his relationship with his parents, his brothers and the Loners."

This isn't Cebulski's first trip around the park with the character; Cebulski was the writer of the *Loners* series that featured the Darkhawk character trying his best to beat the super-hero habit. "C.B. did such a great job of exploring Chris Powell's struggles in the pages of *Loners*," said editor Bill Rosemann, "That he reminded many of us just how cool Darkhawk could be."

As the recent issue of *Nova* shows, he's back in the super-hero job full-time with his new role as the security chief of Project: P.E.G.A.S.U.S. But the real question is how he goes from being stationed in a government facility deep in the mountains to the outer reaches of space.

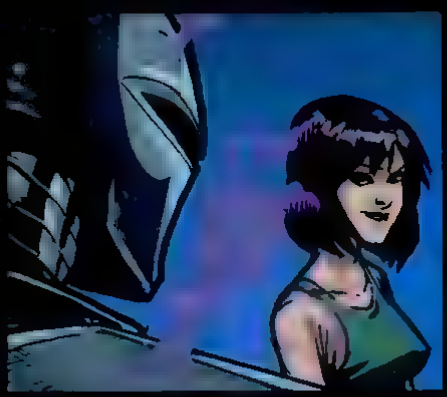
"That's really the crux of this series, to get him from point A to point B," explained Cebulski. "[*Nova* writers] Dan Abnett

"(Abnett and Lanning) hatched some amazing ideas that revealed the shocking connection that Darkhawk has to the events of *War of Kings*."

– Editor Bill Rosemann

"The crime rate was pretty high in New York at the time, so the idea that a cop's son would want to use the Darkhawk amulet as an 'edge against crime' was topical," said Fingeroth. "Also, I think there was a general feeling that Marvel needed a 'Spider-Man for the '90s' – a teen super hero new to the game – and Darkhawk was designed to play that role."

One of Darkhawk's strong points has always been the costume design. Dubbed by some as a "robotic Batman," it was originally designed by Keith Pollard before original series artist Mike Manley put his own stamp on it, and that became Darkhawk. The dark armored suit with the hawkish helmet gives a menacing look, and with the retractable glider wings it offers a unique silhouette. Add in the grappling-hook claw-cable on his right arm, and you've got an armored hero that has more mobility than your standard metal-wrapped warrior. The artist of the upcoming series is carrying on that design and making it look as fresh as the day it was made.

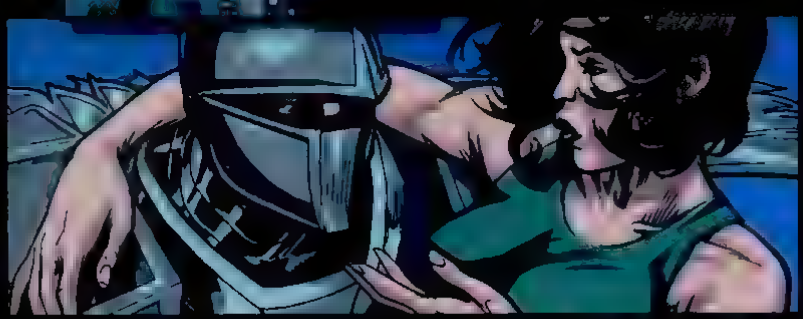


and Andy Lanning have had Darkhawk kicking butt in *Nova* and they have definite plans for him in *War of Kings*. After discussing matters with Marvel and editor Bill Rosemann, they were all kind enough to give me the opportunity to go in and tie up some of the loose ends that were left over with Darkhawk from his *Loners* days before he goes off on his grand cosmic adventure, opening a new chapter in his life."

Just as *Annihilation* served as a "re"-launching pad for Nova (who now stars in his own acclaimed series), *War of Kings* is where Darkhawk will be given the chance to regain some notoriety in the Marvel Universe. But where did he come from originally?

Darkhawk originally debuted in his own self-titled series *Darkhawk* #1 in 1991 as a normal New York City teenager who found an amulet that gave him the powers that remain with him today. His creation was part of an initiative at Marvel to generate interesting new characters, said original writer Danny Fingeroth.

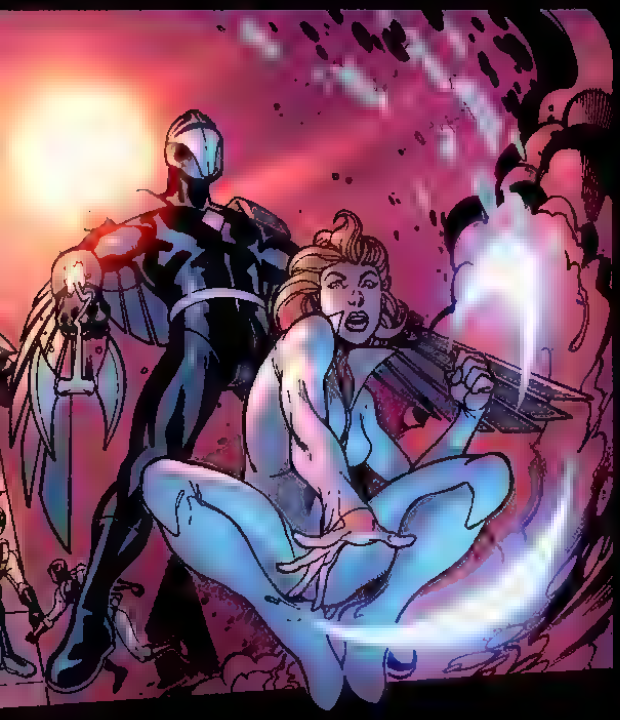
As far as powers go, Darkhawk owes it all to the extraterrestrial amulet he wears that transforms him into the Darkhawk suit. In that, he has enhanced physical abilities that include strength, as well as energy blasts from his chest amulet. The suit also has mechanical attributes with retractable glider wings and the previously mentioned grappling hook. Think the gadgets of Batman with the powers of Green Lantern mixed in.



ONLY THE LONELY: Darkhawk was a key part of the angst-filled ensemble of C.B. Cebulski's cult fave *Loners*. (Art from *Loners* #1 by Karl Moline.)

"He's the Spider-Man of the '90s..."

– Writer and Darkhawk fan Robert Kirkman



LEAGUE OF LOSERS: Darkhawk leads a team of lovable losers, including Dagger and Gravity, in Robert Kirkman's *Marvel Team-Up #15-18*. (Art by Paco Medina.)

VERSUS VECTOR: Darkhawk takes on the most powerful of the U-Foes in the first issue of his *WOK* mini. (Art from *WOK: Darkhawk #1* by Harvey Talibao.)

In addition to his own series, he also joined in adventures with the New Warriors, the West Coast Avengers and most recently the Loners. He's a formidable hero, having gone toe-to-toe with Venom, the Hobgoblin and the Punisher.

"I really enjoyed being able to tell the character's developing saga from beginning to end over the course of over four years," Fingeroth explained. "That's a rare thing."

Fast forward to the present day and Darkhawk is no longer a new kid on the Marvel block but a proper adult with responsibilities. Powell is in charge of security at Project: PEGASUS, while still dating Loners teammate Turbo. What led to his full-fledged return to his own comic? Good question.

"It was a combination of events," explained editor Bill Rosemann. "First, Dan and Andy (a.k.a. DnA) did a great job of bringing Darkhawk back the forefront of the Marvel U. in *Nova* and cementing him as a compelling supporting character. Second, the reader response made us quickly realize that Chris Powell was ready to once again fly from a supporting to a starring role. Finally, DnA hatched some amazing ideas that revealed the shocking connection that Darkhawk has to the events of *War of Kings*."

As Cebulski has said, this new limited series will chart Darkhawk's future by looking – and questioning – his past. "In fact, while you may not realize it while you read it, one action in *Secret Invasion: War of Kings* begins the destruction and transformation of Darkhawk's world."

Cebulski's interest in the character shows, with multiple times

writing the character. The writer himself admits that he's followed the character since his first issue. Why does he like him so much?

"What makes Darkhawk cool is his unpredictability," said Cebulski. "Chris had to figure everything out for himself, from the day he found the Darkhawk amulet and the armor. He never had any of the answers. Hell, he never knew any of the questions he should even be asking.

"There was no Uncle Ben telling him, 'With great power there must also come great responsibility', like Spider-Man had. He was from a somewhat broken home and his parents weren't really around, so he didn't have a lot of guidance. He had to figure it all out on his own. He acted and reacted by trusting his gut. And he did what he thought was right, even when it wasn't always right," explained Cebulski.

"Darkhawk was a true teen hero in that regard; he acted on instinct, followed his heart, screwed up from time to time, and eventually learned from his mistakes. Or thought he did. That's what made him cool in readers' eyes: We never knew what he was going to do next. And we still don't."

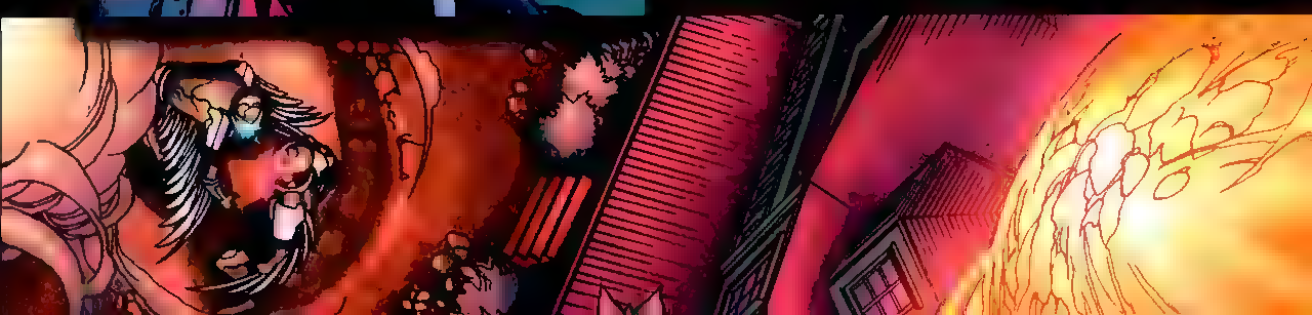
The character made a real impact with readers at the time, from our own C.B. Cebulski to other writers who have tackled the character over time. Take Robert Kirkman for example.

"Erik Larsen talks about how Nova was his Spider-Man... he was someone with an accessible first issue that you could read and follow from the start. For kids of the '90s, that was Darkhawk," said Kirkman, who recently wrote the character in *Marvel Team-Up*. "He's the Spider-Man of the '90s, and that's something that's really cool."

As for Darkhawk's future after the conclusion of *War of Kings: Darkhawk* in March, that's up to you, says editor Bill Rosemann. "It's all in the hands of the readers. If they want it (and if Darkhawk survives *War of Kings*), we will do it!"

WAR OF KINGS: DARKHAWK is a two-issue limited series that premieres in February. In fact, loyal Spotlight readers, it just might be on a shelf at your local comic shop. It was due to hit the street a few week's before Marvel Spotlight: War of Kings, so if it's not sold out, call up your comic vendor of choice and have them reserve you a copy!

HARVEY TOLIBAO: *The War of Kings: Darkhawk* artist brings an array of [illegible] favorites. (Art from *WOK: Darkhawk* #1 by Tolibao.)



THERE'S A PL

MARVEL'S MOST FASCINATING SUPER-POWERED SUBCULTURE TAKES TO THE STARS TO FIND A PLACE TO CALL HOME

By Sheila Johnson

Art from *Fantastic Four #240* by John Byrne

LACE FOR US

The Marvel Universe is filled with gregarious characters that are known just as well within that universe as they are outside of it. Super heroes such as Ms. Marvel and Iron Man have their own press agents. Dazzler was a bona fide rock star, adored by millions of fans. And Johnny Storm? Any comic book reader familiar with the Fantastic Four knows how much the Human Torch just loves the glow of the limelight. Far beyond the reach of even these near-mythical personalities, however, another society of individuals with superhuman abilities has quietly developed, advancing itself far beyond human technology yet for the most part remaining isolated. The members of this society are known as the Inhumans.

Led by Black Bolt, the stoic king with a voice more powerful than a hydrogen bomb, the Inhumans have, in recent years, found themselves interacting more with the world beyond the protective borders and barriers surrounding their beloved home city, Attilan. From their early encounters with the Fantastic Four to Black Bolt's meetings with the other members of the Illuminati, the Inhumans have integrated themselves into the lives of Marvel's most-read characters perhaps even more thoroughly than some members of this notoriously reclusive race would have ever cared to. Yet in this spring's *War of Kings* event, the Inhumans will take this even further and fight the ever-expanding Shi'ar empire, intending to prove once and for all that reclusiveness is not the same as weakness.

ROYAL FAMILY
The Inhumans, from left to right, Triton, Gorgon, Karnak, Black Bolt, Medusa and Crystal. (Cover to *Inhumans (1998) #1* by Jae Lee.)

EARLY HISTORY AND FIRST APPEARANCES

Surprisingly, the first Inhuman to make an appearance was not Black Bolt the king, but Medusa, a stunningly beautiful woman with red hair that was incredibly long – and very much alive. Yet as readers saw in *Fantastic Four #36*, Medusa was then associated not with the Inhumans but with a gang of human criminals calling themselves "the Frightful Four." Only through a story arc beginning in 1965's *Fantastic Four #44* and continuing through issue #48 were the rest of the Inhumans uncovered and the reason for Medusa's flight from their secret sanctuary revealed.

The Inhumans that were presented in this story arc – Black Bolt, Medusa, Gorgon, Crystal, Karnak, Triton, and Maximus – were considered royalty, members (or soon-to-be members) of the Inhumans' ruling family. At that time, it was Maximus who was in power, having wrenched the crown from his brother Black Bolt, then later commanding that Medusa, Black Bolt's true love, be betrothed to him instead. The Inhuman fighter Gorgon, ever loyal to the bearer of the crown despite his true respect for Black Bolt, retrieved Medusa after she had made her escape to the human world but found himself deceived, as he had not known that Medusa would be forced to marry a man she did not love. When Gorgon and Medusa returned to the Inhumans' hidden realm on Earth, however, their kin were with them – and the Fantastic Four soon followed (complete with a love-struck Johnny Storm fawning over Crystal, Medusa's sister).

Readers already knew how the Fantastic Four had received their powers; through this story as well as later tales, they also came to know how the Inhumans received theirs. The Inhumans were revealed to be spawned by the Kree, the result of the Kree's genetic experiments on early human inhabitants of Earth. As Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning, the writers of *War of Kings*, explain, "In their history, the Inhumans were created by the Kree to become their Praetorian fighting force," but were abandoned for unknown reasons. Left on Earth to lead their own lives, the Inhumans became masters of their own evolution by developing a chemical called Terrigen that, when an Inhuman was exposed to it, would unlock the secrets of the Inhuman's genetic code

and cause each one to develop a unique superhuman ability and often a strikingly *inhuman* appearance.

The results of that development were fully visible in each Inhuman who stood against Maximus in *Fantastic Four #47*: Medusa, with her prehensile hair; Gorgon, whose strong cloven hooves could smash and shatter any surface; Karnak, who could detect the weakness of any person or object and attack with ease; Crystal, with her mastery of the four elements; the then-captive Triton, a mighty amphibious being; and Black Bolt, whose voice was so powerful that he could level a city with a whisper. Together they stood and with the Fantastic Four they fought, and finally, Black Bolt took the crown that was rightfully his back from Maximus and placed it on his own head.

The battle caused the Inhumans to think that, perhaps, they belonged among the humans, and it marked the beginning of increased interaction with human (and superhuman) society. Since the Inhumans' first appearance, they have continued to work alongside the Fantastic Four and have helped the Avengers and the X-Men, with Crystal and Medusa even joining human super-teams for short periods. Yet within their own closed society, their laws keep them in a rigid caste system arranged according to genetic superiority, with strict preventions from marrying outside of their race. Their exchanges with the outside world are tentative because of this, and the balance between introversion and extroversion is a difficult one to maintain. And as with any society, the responsibility for this balance falls most heavily on the shoulders of the leader.

"UNDER HIS STOIC RULE ...HE'S TAUGHT THEM TO ENDURE. NOW HE WILL TEACH THEM TO TRIUMPH."

— DnA on Black Bolt and the Inhumans in *War of Kings*

ROYAL ROMANCE: The bond between Black Bolt and his queen, Medusa, has been the driving force behind the Inhumans' struggle for peace.

(Art from *Secret Invasion: Inhumans #4* by Tom Raney.)

BLACK BOLT, THE KING

Throughout most of the Inhumans' history (which, in Marvel continuity, begins ages before the recorded history of man), the people of Attilan have lived in their hidden refuge in relative peace. The reign of Black Bolt, however, has proven to be one of the most tumultuous periods in that history. During that time, Black Bolt has been exiled and has regained his crown from Maximus. Additionally, in 2000's limited *Inhumans* series written by Paul Jenkins and drawn by Jae Lee, Black Bolt had the entire city of Attilan moved from its location in the Atlantic to the Himalayas to protect its scientific secrets, and in a later limited series helmed by Carlos Pacheco and Rafael Marin, he saw his subjects enslaved by Ronan the Accuser, the militant Kree who sought to reclaim the fighting force his ancestors created long ago. Despite the upheaval, however, the Inhumans remain loyal to their true king.

"Black Bolt has always protected and guided the Inhumans through their trials and tribulations," explain Abnett and Lanning. "Under his stoic rule, they have retained their nobility and honor in the face of those who fear and mistrust them. He's taught them to endure. Now (in *War of Kings*), he will teach them to triumph."

It is a lesson that Black Bolt knows well. Marvel's recent *Secret Invasion* event exposed the Black Bolt who had

SILENT WAR: Frazer Irving's impressionistic art portrays the desolation of an Attilan laid low by the Inhumans' war with the humans of Earth. (Art from *Silent War #6* by Frazer Irving.)

been meeting with the other members of the Illuminati as a shape-shifting Skrull impostor. The four-issue *Secret Invasion: Inhumans* series expanded upon this by showing that the real Black Bolt had been captured and replaced on the way to one such clandestine meeting some time before the *World War Hulk* story line. The Skrulls had done so intending to use Black Bolt and the strength of his world-leveling voice as their ultimate weapon.

Abnett and Lanning hope to turn this humiliating abduction into one of Black Bolt's strengths. "Black Bolt simply isn't going to take it any more. He's leading the Inhumans into a new era of proactive vigor. Whereas before, they have always endured what has come their way, now they are embarking on active destiny. They are going to reclaim their heritage."

This attitude promises to prove helpful when the Inhumans encounter the empire-absorbing Shi'ar. "Black Bolt will not let the Shi'ar impede the Inhumans' progress – and Vulcan is expanding the Shi'ar's empire wherever he can. This will set them on a collision course neither will back down from," Abnett and Lanning promise. "Black Bolt probably hasn't considered Vulcan particularly, but he will not shrink from a fight if their paths conflict. Black Bolt has unleashed the Inhumans' full potential and woe betide anyone who gets in their way."

Yet before Black Bolt could be in a position to so influence the course of the Inhumans' destiny, he had to be rescued and freed from the Skrulls. The climax of *Secret Invasion: Inhumans* saw a force of those most dedicated to Black Bolt do exactly that and proved that the old maxim is true: A king is nothing without the love of his queen.

MEDUSA, THE QUEEN

Back in *Fantastic Four #36*, Medusa hardly seemed like a character that would be loving and loyal to anyone, but the later revelation that she had fled the Inhumans' sanctuary to avoid marrying anyone other than her beloved demonstrated the depth of her affection and respect for Black Bolt. Later storylines laid open the depths of these sentiments. In the 2000 series, her distinguishing trait – her hair – was shorn from her head while she implemented a secret plan of Black Bolt's devising, and in the *Secret Invasion: Inhumans* run, it was she who decided to leave Attilan with a small contingent while the city was being attacked by Skrulls and go to find her husband.

Most importantly, however, she serves as Black Bolt's voice. A king who keeps himself silent would be able to exert only so much power, but with Medusa understanding his thoughts and wishes and interpreting them for all to hear, he is able to lead his subjects toward the great heights he hopes for them to reach.

Black Bolt's abduction could have compromised that; while he was imprisoned, the Skrulls revealed to him that Medusa had spoken to the impostor of intimate secrets and had also slept with him. Because of the strength of the bond between king and queen, though, this will become a point in *War of Kings* from which the couple will move forward.

"Medusa is becoming very driven," say Abnett and Lanning. "She shares her husband's ambitions and determination. She is privately desperate to prove her loyalties, having shared her bed and her confidences with a Skrull impostor. More than ever, she will become Black Bolt's voice."

That voice will fill the ears of all of those who fought for Black Bolt – and even those who did not.

"SHE IS PRIVATELY DESPERATE TO PROVE HER LOYALTIES, HAVING SHARED HER BED AND HER CONFIDENCES WITH A SKRULL IMPOSTOR."

— DnA on Medusa

LADRONN: Four glorious covers adorned the four-issue 2000 limited series *Inhumans*, featuring Black Bolt, Medusa, Karnak, Gorgon, Triton and their foe Ronan the Accuser. (Cover art by Ladrönn.)

THE ROYAL FAMILY

Without subjects, what purpose would a king have? The members of the Inhumans' ruling clan accept Black Bolt's word as law, but beyond that, they also counsel him, comfort him – and care for him.

One of the people whom Black Bolt trusts most among those in his inner circle is Karnak, who has the uncanny ability to detect any flaw in an object or foe. This gift was what led Karnak to be the one other person along with Medusa to be trusted with Black Bolt's plan to relocate Attilan in the 2000 series. As Abnett and Lanning see it, "Karnak's abilities make him an extremely able and perceptive strategist and advisor. Black Bolt trusts him to point out any flaw in his plans." This is a role that he will continue to play in *War of Kings*. "Karnak is Black Bolt's voice of reason and keeps him grounded when others may be impulsive or rash."

Among those who may be considered impulsive or rash is Crystal, Medusa's sister, the member of the royal family who has most desired to experience life outside of Attilan. She fell for Johnny Storm upon their first meeting and later ignored Inhuman law to marry the mutant Quicksilver (a marriage that has since been annulled). Yet in the course of *Secret Invasion: Inhumans*, she accepted the duties that Medusa said were hers as a member of the Inhumans' ruling family and agreed to marry Ronan the Accuser in exchange for the Inhumans' use of Kree resources to free Black Bolt. In contrast to her earlier behavior, the attitude that Crystal currently espouses is one of responsibility. "Crystal isn't too keen on the idea (of marrying Ronan)," Abnett and Lanning explain, "But as the daughter of a royal dynasty she understands the duties and obligations of the privileged. This is a symbolic wedding, a marriage of two great houses, and it has nothing to do with personal feelings." Symbolic though the wedding may be, in the face of cosmic conflict, it promises to have an influence over events.

Any event that takes place on that cosmic scale is bound to incorporate a number of characters; with a group such as the Inhumans, it's almost expected. In *War of Kings*, even Triton, the water-specialized Inhuman, will have his part in the conflict. "Triton is a formidable warrior and, like his brethren, will play a dynamic role in the upcoming war," Abnett and Lanning pledge, a role that will likely involve the impressive Kree-modified weapons he received in *Secret Invasion: Inhumans*. Gorgon, the perennial heavy and battlefield veteran, has again been enlisted to stomp the Inhumans' antagonists into submission, and even Maximus, who was redeemed at the end of *Secret Invasion: Inhumans* by his ability to spot impending danger, will be allowed to contribute to the struggle by designing weaponry.

"In a story of this scale, with a cast this big," Abnett and Lanning say, "the trick is to make sure the main players all get their moment to shine. We're trying to engineer memorable character moments and story lines as well as creating exciting sequences to showcase their powers and abilities."

It's a tall order to be sure, but one made slightly easier when the writers realize how distinct and unusual the Inhumans look, even when standing among the other remarkable denizens of the Marvel Universe. Abnett, Lanning and their cast of Inhumans will have their chance to stand out when War of Kings debuts this March.

SKRULL SLUGFEST: Black Bolt puts an end to his Skrull captivity with a nice left uppercut. (Art from *SI: Inhumans* #4 by Raney.)

WAR OF KINGS

THE READING CHRONOLOGY!

War of Kings takes a new look at the outer limits of the Marvel Universe! While the royal family of the Inhumans has been rocked in the aftermath of *World War Hulk* and *Secret Invasion*, Cyclops' long-lost brother, Vulcan, is building an empire in the Shi'ar galaxy. What will happen when two of the most powerful entities in the universe clash? This chronology reveals the separate story threads that eventually join in the War of Kings event — get ready for a reading list full of action, romance and cosmic adventure!

THE INHUMANS

Inhumans TPB
Collects *Inhumans (1998) #1-12*
By Paul Jenkins and Jae Lee
Eisner-nominated series explores the fantastic world of the Inhumans!

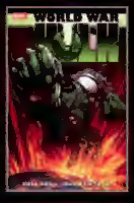
Fantastic Four/Inhumans TPB
Collects *Inhumans (2000) #1-4* and *Fantastic Four #51-54*
By Carlos Pacheco, Mark Bagley, Ladrönn and more!
The Inhumans leave home, plus a classic modern-day FF/Inhumans team-up!

Young Inhumans TPB
Collects Inhumans (2003) #1-12
By Sean McKeever, Matthew Clark, Dougie Braithwaite and more!
A new generation of Inhumans is sent to Earth on a mission – but of war or peace?

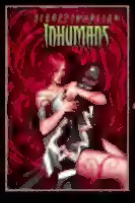
New Avengers: Illuminati TPB
Collects *New Avengers: Illuminati #1-6*
By Brian Michael Bendis and Jim Cheung
Black Bolt stands with the world's elite group of heroes!

Decimation: Son of M TPB
Collects *Decimation: Son of M #1-6*
By David Hine and Roy Allan Martinez
After the fall of the House of M, a shattered Quicksilver steals the Terrigen Crystals!

Silent War TPB
Collects *Silent War #1-6*
By David Hine and Frazer Irving
It's all-out war between the Inhumans and the people of Earth!

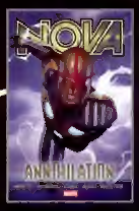


Hulk: WWH — World War Hulk TPB
Collects *World War Hulk #1-5*
By Greg Pak and John Romita Jr.
Black Bolt, his fellow Illuminati and planet Earth are all targets of Hulk's vengeance!



Secret Invasion: Inhumans TPB
Collects *Secret Invasion: Inhumans #1-4*
By Joe Pokaski and Tom Raney
The Inhumans have been invaded by Skrull impostors. Who can they trust?

COSMIC HEROES



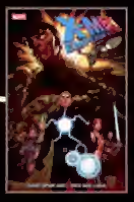
Nova Vol. 1: Annihilation HC
Collects *Nova #1-12* and *Nova Annual #1*
By Dan Abnett, Andy Lanning, Sean Chen, Paul Pelletier and more!
With nearly unlimited power, can Richard Rider police the entire universe?

Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 1: Legacy HC
Collects *Guardians of the Galaxy #1-6*
By Andy Lanning, Dan Abnett and Paul Pelletier
After defeating Ultron, the Guardians find new ways to protect the galaxy!

THE X-MEN

X-Men: Deadly Genesis TPB
Collects *X-Men: Deadly Genesis #1-6*
By Ed Brubaker and Trevor Hairsine
Cyclops and Havok are reunited with Vulcan, a long-lost brother…who wants them dead!

Uncanny X-Men: The Rise and Fall of the Shi'ar Empire TPB
Collects *Uncanny X-Men #475-486*
By Ed Brubaker, Billy Tan and Clayton Henry
The X-Men's final showdown with Vulcan will leave the team forever changed!



X-Men: Emperor Vulcan TPB
Collects *X-Men: Emperor Vulcan #1-5*
By Christopher Yost and Paco Diaz
Havok leads the Starjammers against his brother, the newly installed Shi'ar emperor!

NEXT ISSUE:

WOLVERINE SPOTLIGHT!

WAR OF KINGS #1
Abnett • Lanning • Pelletier – March 2009
X-MEN: KINGBREAKER #4
Yost • Weaver – March 2009
WAR of KINGS
GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY #10
Abnett • Lanning • Walker – February 2009
WAR OF KINGS: DARKHAWK #2
Cebulski • Tolibao – March 2009